

John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15 – May 23, 2021 (Pentecost)

There's a great moment in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams. The two main characters, a human named Arthur and his alien hitchhiking friend, Ford, get into trouble. In fact, they're about to be executed.

And Arthur says, “You know. it's at times like this, when I'm trapped in an alien airlock with a man from another planet, and about to die of asphyxiation in deep space, that I really wish I'd listened to what my mother told me when I was young.”

Ford asks, “Why, what did she tell you?” And Arthur replies, “I don't know. I didn't listen.”

That's the key, isn't it? You'll never know if you don't listen. How many wonderful pieces of advice and wisdom and encouragement have we missed in our lives because we didn't listen? From our parents? From our teachers? From our pastors and mentors? And we don't even know what we've missed out on because we weren't listening.

And that's really what Jesus is trying to tell us in our Gospel lesson. In this passage, He prophecies for us the event which we celebrate today. Pentecost. The coming of the Holy Spirit.

And I think He had a keen interest in preparing them for the coming of the Holy Spirit because, well, the disciples had a pretty poor track record when it came to listening to Jesus. He was supposed to be their teacher. Their rabbi. And in ancient Jewish culture that meant effectively making Him their father.

The term rabbi was not just a term of respect. It defined a relationship. One in which you would become part of the rabbi's household almost as his children. Working with him. Living with him. And, in the process, learning from him. Not in a formal, classroom setting. But in daily life. Simply absorbing whatever knowledge and wisdom you could learn.

Well, Jesus keeps His end of the bargain. He has lots to teach them as they travel around Galilee and Judea. But the disciples... they don't seem to grasp the notion that they need to be listening. You'll never know if you don't listen. And a good chunk of what Jesus says just seems to go in one ear and out the other. The incarnation. The crucifixion. The resurrection. The second coming. All of it.

So Jesus tries again. “Look guys... I know you're not listening. But don't worry. I'll send someone to help you remember. I'll send someone to teach it to you all over again. But when He comes – when the Holy Spirit comes – LISTEN TO HIM.”

And you'll notice, it is definitely “HIM.” Not “IT.” This is a little pet peeve of mine, so I'm going to take a minute aside to explain this to you. The Holy Spirit is a person of the Trinity. Not a thing. He is not an energy field projected by God. He is not a warm fuzzy feeling that God injects into you. He is not The Force from Star Wars.

There are an awful lot of Christians who think that about the Holy Spirit. That's a heresy. The church dealt with it 1,500 years ago. It's called pneumatomachianism. But you don't need to know that. You just need know that it's wrong.

The Holy Spirit is a person of the Trinity. Just like the Father. Just like the Son. And yes, He does appear in some non-human forms like doves or tongues of fire or rushing winds. But then again, so does God the Father and so does God the Son and we still think of them as persons of the Trinity. As “He,” not “It.”

In fact, it's only been in the last few centuries that the Holy Spirit began to be displayed almost exclusively in Christian artwork with the form of a dove or a tongue of fire. Throughout the history of the church, if you saw a piece of artwork depicting the Trinity, it usually showed three men standing together. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And I think that's actually kind of important. It was important for the disciples. And it's important for us as well. Because the more you turn the Holy Spirit into a thing, the less He becomes a person you can talk to. A person who can comfort you. A person who can help you.

That's the name Jesus uses for Him. The Helper. At least, that's how our ESV translates it. In Greek He's called the Paraklete. Which is a profoundly deep title. Because, in ancient Greek society, a paraklete is someone who comes to your aid when you need Him most.

He's the lawyer who takes up your case when you're wrongly accused. He's the paramedic who gives you CPR when you're at death's door. He's the soldier who shows up, guns blazing, to rescue you from the battlefield. And, yes, He's the best friend who helps you when the world seems to be falling apart around you.

In many ways, the Holy Spirit is our mother. Or father. Or teacher. Or whatever parental figure you want to use. He's the person we call when we need comfort. Or advice. Or to get bailed out of a bad situation.

Right now, around the country, it is graduation season. Teenagers marking the end of their childhood and moving on to bigger and better things. College. Careers. Family. You may have graduated from high school a short time ago or many years ago. Either way, you and I are not that much different from those teenagers graduating at the high school this afternoon.

We like to think of ourselves as adults. With freedom. And we don't need someone looking over our shoulders. And we don't need someone telling us what to do. And we don't need someone making choices for us.

And, in general, we act like a bunch of 18 year olds, fresh out of high school. Embarking on the new life that God has given us. But without a clue what we're doing. And all that God wants to tell us is, "Listen to your mother." Listen to your paraklete. Listen to the Holy Spirit.

That's what Jesus' message is to His disciples. Listen to the Holy Spirit. Don't know what to say? He will testify about me. Don't know what to do? He will convict the world of guilt in regards to sin and righteousness and judgment. Don't know where to go? He will guide you into all truth.

He will speak to you my Word. And He will tell you what is yet to come. He will take from what is mine and make it known to you. He will point you back to me. He will point us back to Christ and all that Christ has done for us.

And when you feel alone and you don't know what to do, He will be there. And He will help you do what is right. And say what is right. And make good choices. He will show you God's Law, even when we don't want to see it. Just as Christ would if He were standing there beside us himself. Because that Law that we hate to read, because we hate to be told what to do, is God's will for us.

And when you make a mistake. When you break that Law. When you find yourself in trouble. When you feel like you're sitting at death's door saying, "I wish I had listened to my mother." He'll be there too. To point out where you went wrong. And to forgive you even when you can't forgive yourself.

To point you back to God's Word for the thousandth time. And God's promise to always love you. Because you are his child. Washed in Holy Baptism. Nourished by Christ's Body and Blood. You are his own.

And, of course, he will be there to remind you of the thing that sinful humans least want to hear, whether we're 18 years old or 80 years old. The thing we least want to hear, but the thing we most need to hear: You'll never know if you don't listen. So listen to your mother. Listen to your Parakete. Listen to the Holy Spirit as he speaks to you through Word and Sacrament. Live this life that God has given you. And call on Him in whatever your need. Amen.